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Turner may fund new sports channel

■ **TELEVISION:** Turner broadcasting may give ESPN a run for its money

NEW YORK (AP) — Ted Turner is actively exploring starting a 24-hour sports news network that would put him in competition with cable powerhouse ESPN, sources familiar with the matter said Monday.

Turner hasn't yet proposed the idea to the board of his Turner Broadcasting System Inc. but the sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, said that could come as early as a scheduled mid-February meeting.

The sports news and information service is seen as a way to leverage Turner's involvement in news gathering with Cable News Network and in covering sports events on his TBS and TNT cable channels.

Atlanta-based Turner Broadcasting declined comment on the report, which first appeared in Monday's edition of the trade publication Advertising Age.

Advertising Age also said news channels on health and entertainment are being discussed.

Turner has demonstrated an ability to spin off new services from his other assets most recently with the creation of CNNfn, a financial news chan-

nel that debuted Dec. 29 with a big lift from the CNN business news staff.

The Turner Movie Classics network relies heavily on the MGM film library Turner acquired in the late 1980s and the Cartoon Network provides an outlet for Turner's Hanna-Barbera unit.

The current plans do not call for putting events on the sports news channel but the new service could air news programs at little added cost from event sites where other Turner channels are operating, one of the sources said.

Advertising Age said senior Turner executives have conducted exhaustive research on the subject and feel there is room for yet another entry in the market for sports TV.

Turner Broadcasting already carries sports events like pro football and basketball on its TBS and TNT cable channels, and it covers sports news on its CNN and Headline News channels.

The cable programmer has agreed to be acquired by Time Warner Inc., which owns Sports Illustrated magazine and the HBO pay-TV channel, which could be helpful in operating a sports news service.

But approval from the Turner Broadcasting board for a sports news network isn't a sure bet.

The cable system owner Telecommunications Inc., a key Turner shareholder, has recently formed a partnership with Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. Ltd. to carry sports programming worldwide.

Advertising Age said the Turner board has already vetoed proposals for a golf channel and a women's channel.

ESPN is one of the most successful cable channels, and is 80 percent owned by Capital Cities/ABC Inc., which is being acquired by The Walt Disney Co.

It covers both sports events and sports news and is one of the largest cable channels in terms of subscribers.

Efforts have been made in recent years to launch an all-sports news channel but they have been unsuccessful due to the difficulty of getting wide distribution on cable systems and because of the amount of sports programming available on both cable and broadcast TV. There is so much programming that it is hard to build a sizable audience or the ad support needed to pay for it.

Turner would presumably have an edge with cable system operators, many of whom currently own a piece of the cable programmer, and in keeping costs low for maintaining the service.

Seles stays unbeaten at Australian Open

■ **TENNIS:** Despite the flu, Sampras also advances in the Grand Slam event

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Unbeaten forever Down Under, Monica Seles picked up where she left off at the Australian Open.

Despite a pulled groin muscle that caused her to wince in pain at times, the top-seeded Seles ran her streak to 22-0 at this Grand Slam event as she brushed past Janet Lee 6-3, 6-0 in 47 minutes on a cool, cloudy Tuesday afternoon.

Pete Sampras, the men's No. 1, showed few lingering effects

of the flu that delayed his arrival as he played mostly from the baseline to bedevil Tasmanian Richard Fromberg 7-5, 6-3, 6-2.

Sampras, who saved all 10 of the break-points against him, didn't bother cranking up his big serve, hitting only four aces to Fromberg's 11. Instead, Sampras, the 1994 champion, contented himself by staying back and picking his spots to charge the net. That worked to perfection as he put away 11 volley winners to Fromberg's one.

"I'm over it. I feel fine," Sampras said of the flu, though he still sounded nasal and congested. "I wasn't really sure how my form was going to be. I felt I hit

the ball pretty well, but I didn't serve great."

Unseeded Stefan Edberg, champion in 1985 on grass and 1987 on hardcourt, began his last Australian Open with a tough 7-6 (8-6), 7-5, 3-6, 5-7, 6-1 victory over No. 36-ranked Jiri Novak.

Three months before she was stabbed in Germany in 1993, Seles won her third straight Australian Open and the last of her eight Grand Slam titles in a thrilling final against Steffi Graf. While Graf is home this time, recovering from foot surgery, Seles is back with a bigger serve, bolder approaches to the net and an occasional running, one-handed forehand.

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